

Testimony of James Budds
Charter Oak State College Student
Appropriations Committee
February 15, 2017

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is James Budds and I am a senior at Charter Oak State College. I am here to ask for your support of Charter Oak State College. I did not follow the traditional path as many of my friends did after graduating from high school. I took time off and worked as a butcher's apprentice, quickly realizing that I needed to go back to school if I was to have a career. I applied to several colleges but had to set my aspirations aside when I found out my girlfriend was pregnant. I watched all of my friends go off to college, start internships, graduate, and receive higher pay in fulfilling careers. I continued to work as a butcher working 50 hours a week, delivered pizzas Friday and Saturday night, and worked security at Hartford Civic Center events just to maintain a paycheck to paycheck existence. At 21, my girlfriend ran into legal troubles and I found myself awarded full custody of a one year old. I was a single parent.

The pivotal moment in my life to push me to go back to school was when my daughter, in first grade, was asked to "bring your parent to school/career day." I was 26. Most of the parents were in their mid-40's, were successful, well-educated, and living in houses that they owned. They were established and comfortable. We were still very much living paycheck to paycheck. My daughter proceeded to proudly tell everyone how her dad, "chops up cows" and how much she "loves his steaks." I knew I had to go back to school if I was going to provide a better life for Victoria. I began taking night classes, part time, at Tunxis Community College with hopes of getting a degree but it wasn't working. I was asking too much of people who helped me with my daughter so I could go back to school. I was working ten hour shifts, rushing back and forth to get to classes, eating junk food in between, then rushing to pick my daughter up from wherever she was that day (after she was asleep). It was not sustainable nor fulfilling. I was afraid my daughter would not know who I was if I kept up that pace.

A friend of mine recommended an online school that would help me get my degree while still being able to work and be with my daughter. Charter Oak's nontraditional educational structure was ideal. I was able to work until 5 or 6, make dinner and hang with Victoria, read her a bedtime story and settle into my course work after she went to bed - and not have to stress about rushing back and forth trying to balance being a single parent, work, and school. I transferred my credits from Tunxis to Charter Oak with ease. I have a 3.50 GPA and expect to graduate this spring with a Bachelor's degree in General Studies with a concentration in Organizational Leadership.

The opportunity and promise of a degree has already opened doors for me. This past July, I applied for an outside sales job that required a four year degree. I explained to the hiring manager that I was within a year of graduating and implored him to give me a shot in a training capacity until then. He asked for my transcripts, saw what I was capable of, and made an exception. I was hired with the stipulation that I complete my studies and graduate in the spring. I am six months into a sales career that is yielding enough for me to care for my daughter in comfort and I am no longer the dad who "chops up cows" at career day. None of this would be possible without Charter Oak's degree without boundaries mission. I hope you see why Charter Oak is important and deserves funding.